

## Young Company Focus

## Shure Pets

# Pet Products & Party Plan

## A SHURE THING

In the past ten years, the pet product industry has experienced tremendous growth—from \$21 billion in 1996 to an estimated \$38 billion today. In part, that growth has been spurred by the changing role pets play in their owners' lives. "If you could go back and talk to people at the turn-of-the-century and you told them that your pet sleeps on your bed with you, they would think you were crazy," says Andrew Shure, Founder of Shure Pets, a

Chicago-based direct seller of pet products. "Today, more and more people are treating pets as part of the family. I'm fascinated with humans' connection with pets. I think it is a very special bond."

That bond prompted Andrew to explore direct selling as the channel of distribution to get his premium pet products into the hands—and paws—of the public. "No one was selling pet products through home parties, so I saw huge opportunity out there," he says. "Pet people are a very special type of audience. And the party plan format allows people to network with others with similar interests."

Since Shure Pet's first pet consultant signed on in 2003, the company's signature Pet Parties have unleashed a lot of attention from pet lovers—and the media—all over the country. *The Wall Street Journal*, CNN, Fox News and *USA Weekend* are just a few of the media outlets that have featured Shure Pets products and parties. Last year, says Andrew, CNN reporter Jeanne Moos attended a party in ritzy Westchester, New York. "These dogs of all sizes were walking up the staircase of this magnificent home in Westchester and Moos was holding a microphone in the dogs' faces."

At Pet Parties like the one in Westchester, Shure Pets consultants showcase the company's line of health and beauty aids, pet and pet lover apparel, treats and toys, beds and gifts. "We encourage our consultants to bring their pets to parties and that really sets the tone," says Andrew. Party guests—human and otherwise—are educated about Shure Pets product line in a fun, social environment. "That's what we are pitching—the opportunity for people to learn about products," Andrew says. "And if they walk away with products, that's fantastic. And if they don't, they have learned something."

That the vast majority of Shure Pets consultants are pet owners lends them built-in credibility with customers as they share their product



Shure Pets founder Andrew Shure with Caillou,  
Vice President of Canine Relations

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knowledge. "Ninety-nine point nine percent of our consultants have pets so they understand the bond we humans have with our four-legged friends." And that, says Andrew, makes Shure Pets consultants especially effective when it comes to sales, because they're passionate about the products they sell. "They aren't selling you something they don't believe in."

Andrew and his team work hard to provide their pet consultants with a product line that's a fit with the direct selling channel of distribution. The company launched with 27 products—all health and beauty aids, which is still the biggest category. As Shure Pets has grown, so has its product line, and today the company boasts more than 200 items, many of them exclusive. Shure Pets also offers a number of breed-specific products, which translates into more than 10,000 individual SKUs.

In addition to a growing product line, Shure Pets has seen sales and recruiting skyrocket over the last year. In the month of May, the company achieved a sales record, posting a nearly 60 percent increase over the previous year. And in the last twelve months, Shure Pets sales force has grown 250 percent to more than 1200 consultants.

To keep up with all that growth, Shure Pets is currently implementing a new back-end software system which will provide



pet consultants with their own personalized Web sites and allow consumers to search for consultants by ZIP code. "Offering that latest in technology for our consultants has been priority No. 1 as it relates to our business," says Andrew. "We really want to provide the tools to empower our consultants to be their own bosses."

Along with the latest technology, Andrew says Shure Pets offers its sales force a number of programs that help them achieve success. "We have a program called Shure Pets University that takes place monthly in our corporate offices," he says. "We discuss the business—where we've been and where we're going. It's an open dialogue and a wonderful opportunity for people to come by and kick the tires." At Shure Pet's Chicago office, consultants can meet "The Pound": Andrew and his team, David Feld, Kristina Meyer, and Caillou, Vice President of Canine Relations (Andrew's mixed breed dog).

For those consultants who can't make the trip to Chicago, Shure Pets also hosts frequent conference calls on a variety of topics. "The consultants are very enthusiastic," says Andrew. "They might have just received their starter kits and are eagerly awaiting their first party. Or they may have already hosted a successful party and might have a question about a particular product. We're here to help them out and offer advice."

Shure Pets not only is committed to helping its pet consultants, the company strives to give back to the community—most often the pet community. "We have a program we call Shure Pet Cares, and we identify an organization that we will earmark money for." Recently, the company and its consultant raised funds for organizations helping pets displaced by Hurricane Katrina. "A lot of people stepped up to the plate," says Andrew.

And with Shure Pets Fundraising Program consultants can partner with charitable organizations who then sell Shure Pets products in their fundraising effort. Consultants earn a percentage of each item sold by the organization, and the charity receives 25 percent of profits. "A high percentage of our consultants are involved with these organizations," said Andrew. "They work in the rescues, or they adopt a pet from a pet rescue organization, so this is their way of giving back to the community."

Currently, the Shure Pets team is gearing up for their second annual Jam-fur-ee Pet Consultant Conference scheduled for August. The theme of this year's Jam-fur-ee is Taking Flight and Andrew is confident that Shure Pets is ready to soar. "The key element to the success of our Pet Parties is our passion for pets and offering superior products," says Andrew. "I feel like we're just getting started. We see the future as very bright and as more and more people find out about us we see a huge opportunity in this marketplace." 🐾

A Shure Pets Pet Party

